



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Tularemia Identified in Four North Dakota Counties

BISMARCK, N.D. – This summer North Dakota has seen an increase in reported cases of tularemia, an uncommon disease that humans can catch from animals and insects. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) and the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA), Animal Health Division, have received reports of two confirmed human cases of tularemia in LaMoure and Burleigh County; one unconfirmed but likely positive human case in Stark County; a case in a squirrel from the Roosevelt Zoo in Minot; and cases in two primates from the Dakota Zoo in Bismarck.

The Roosevelt and Dakota Zoos are taking precautions to protect their animals, staff and visitors from the disease. Visiting a zoo does not pose an increased risk to the general public. However, people are advised to follow guidelines against touching animals that are posted by the zoos, and to avoid direct contact with wild animals, such as rabbits and rodents, which are known carriers of tularemia.

Tularemia, also known as rabbit fever, is caused by bacteria that are commonly transmitted to humans and animals by ticks and deer flies. Pets can also become infected if they consume the remains of an infected animal. Other means of infection in humans include skin contact with blood or tissue of infected animals, inhalation of contaminated dust or aerosols, and ingestion of contaminated food or water.

The symptoms of tularemia in humans vary depending on how the infection was acquired, and generally appear one to 14 days after exposure. “Symptoms of tularemia may include fever, chills, headache, muscle ache, diarrhea, sore throat and cough. When a person is bitten by an infected tick or deer fly or handles an infected animal, an ulcer may appear where the bacteria entered the skin, and lymph nodes may also become swollen and painful,” said Laura Cronquist, epidemiologist with the NDDoH. “If people have symptoms of tularemia, it is important they tell their healthcare provider about any potential exposures, including contact with sick or dead animals and tick or deer fly bites.”

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

The NDDoH recommends the following precautions to avoid possible exposure to tularemia:

- Use insect repellents containing 20 to 30 percent DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 - be sure to follow the instructions on the label for maximum effectiveness and safety
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks
- Remove attached ticks as soon as possible
- Do not drink untreated surface water
- Do not mow over dead animals

The NDDA advises pet and livestock owners to consult with their local veterinarians for the best management practices and products, such as flea and tick treatments, to help protect their animals. Tularemia is most commonly associated with rabbits and rodents, but it may affect other animals. Domestic animals exhibiting clinical signs associated with tularemia may develop a fever, cough, decreased mobility, refuse to eat, vomit or have diarrhea. These clinical signs should be reported to a veterinarian.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF) advises people to wear disposable gloves when handling, dressing or skinning wild animals, and to wash their hands thoroughly afterward. Game meat should be cooked thoroughly before eating. Animals found dead near human water sources should be handled with caution, and should be reported to the NDGF.

For more information about tularemia in humans, contact Laura Cronquist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease/tickborne/Tularemia/Tularemia.htm. For more information about tularemia in animals, contact the NDDA at 701.328.2655 or visit www.nd.gov/ndda/disease/tularemia.

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